

LANGFORD OF THE THREE BARS

BY KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES

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CHAPTER I.

The Island With a Mystery.

He said positively to Battie Ax, his sorcery buckskin cow pony, that they would ride to the summit of this one bluff, and that it should be the last. But he had said the name thing many times since striking the barren hill region flanking both sides of the river. Hump after hump had been surmounted since the sound of the first promise had tickled the ears of the tired broncho, humps as alike as the two humps of a Baetrian camel, the monotonous continuity of which might very well have confused the mind of one less at home on these ranges than George Williston. Even he, riding a blind trail since sun-up, sitting his saddle with a heavy indifference born of heat and fatigue, began to think it might be that they were describing a circle and the sun was playing them strange tricks. Still, he urged his pony to one more effort; just such a push farther and they would retrace their steps, giving up for this day at least the locating of a small bunch of cattle, branded a lazy S, missing these three days.

Had not untoward circumstances intervened, he might still have gone blindly on; far, laying aside the gambling fever that was on him, he could ill afford to lose the ten or twelve acres somewhere wandering the wide range or huddled into some safe place, there to abide the time when a daring rustler might conveniently play at witchcraft with the brand or otherwise dispose of them with profit to himself and with credit to his craft. Moreover, what might possibly never have been missed from the vast herds of Langford, his neighbor of the plains country, was of most serious import to Williston.

"Devil take you, Battie Ax, but you're slow," muttered Williston. "I'd give a good deal to sit down this minute to some of my little girl's flapjacks and coffee. But nothing for us, lazy-bones, till midnight—or morning, more likely. Do walk up as if you had some little standing in the world of cow ponies. You haven't, of a surety, but you might make an effort. All things are possible to him who tries, you know, which is a tremendous lie, of course. But perhaps it doesn't apply to poor devils like us who are 'has-beens.' Here we are, Ah!"

There were no more hills. Almost directly at his feet was one of those precipitous cut-aways that characterize the border bluffs of the Missouri river. A few more steps, in the dark, and horse and rider would have plunged over a sheer wall of nearly 200 feet. As it was, Williston gave a gasp of involuntary horror which almost simultaneously gave place to one of wonder and astonishment. He had struck the river at a point absolutely new to him. It was the time of low water, and the river, in most of its phases muddy and sullen-looking, gleamed silver and gold with the glitter of the setting sun, making a royal highway to the dwelling-place of Phoebus. A little to the north of this sparkling highway lay what would have been an island in high water, thickly wooded with willows and cottonwoods. Now a long stretch of sand reached between bluff and island.

Dismounting with the quick thought that younger island might hold the secret of his lost cattle, he crept as close to the edge as he dared. The cut was sheer and narrow, unfathomably deep, and he was on the point of remounting to retrace his steps when he dropped his foot from the stirrup amazed. Was the day of miracles not yet passed?

It was the sun, of course. Twelve hours of sun in the eyes could play strange tricks and might even cause a dancing black speck to assume the semblance of a man on horseback, picking his way easily, though maybe a bit warily, across the waste of sand. He seemed to have sprung from the very bowels of the bluff. Whence else? Many a rod beyond and above the ghostly figure frowned the tawny, wicked outlaw. Path for neither horse nor man appeared so far as eye could reach. It must be the sun. But it was not the sun.

Motionless, intent, a figure cast in bronze as the sun went down, the lean ranchman gazed steadfastly down upon the miniature man and horse creeping along so far below. Not until the object of his fixed gaze had been swallowed by the trees and underbrush did his muscles relax. This man had ridden as if afraid.

"What man has done, man can do," ran swiftly through Williston's brain, and with no idea of abandoning his search until he had probed the mystery, he mounted and rode northward, closely examining the edge of the precipice as he went along for any evidence of a possible descent. Presently he came upon a cross ravine, devoid of shrubbery, too steep for a horse, but presenting possibilities for a man. With unerring instinct he followed the crosscut westward. Soon a scattering of scrub oaks began to appear, and sunnily already streaked with crimson. A little farther and the trees began to show spiral wreaths of woodbine and wild grape. Yet a little farther, and doubtless there would be outlet for horse as well as man.

But Williston was growing impatient. Besides, the thought came to him that he had best not risk his buckskin to the unknown dangers of an untried trail. What if he should go lame? Accordingly he was left behind

in a slight depression where he would be pretty well hidden, and Williston scrambled down the steep incline alone. When foothold or handhold was lacking, he simply let himself go and slid, grasping the first root or branch that presented itself in his dare-devil course.

Arrived at the bottom, he found his clothes torn and his hands bleeding; but that was nothing. With grim determination he made his way through the ravine and struck across the sand trail with a sure realization of his danger, but without the least abatement of his resolution. The sand was firm under his feet. The water had



Turned and Faced Squarely the Spot Which Held the Watching Man.

receded a sufficient length of time before to make the thought of quick sands an idle fear. No puff of cloudy smoke leaped from a rifle barrel. If, as he more than half suspected, the island was a rendezvous for cattle thieves, a place surely admirably fitted by nature for such unlawful operations, the rustlers were either overconfident of the impenetrability of their retreat and kept no lookout, or they were insolently indifferent to exposure. The former premise was the more likely. A light breeze, born of the afterglow, came scurrying down the river bed. Here and there, where the sand was finest and driest, it rose in little whirlwinds. No sound broke the stillness of the summer evening.

What was that? Coyotes barking over yonder across the river? That alien sound? A man's laugh, a curse, a heart-breaking bellow of pain. Williston parted over so slightly the thick foliage of underbrush that separated him from the all too familiar sounds and peered within.

In the midst of a small clearing—man-made, for several stumps were scattered here and there—two men were engaged in unroping and reloading a red steer, similar in all essential respects to a bunch of three or four huddled together a little to one side. They were all choice, well-fed animals, but there were thousands of just such beasts herding on the free ranges. He owned red steers like these, but was there a man in the cattle country who did not? They were impossible of identification without the aid of their brand, and it happened that they were so huddled as to completely obliterate Williston's line of vision. To decipher the stamp that would disclose their ownership, that they were the legitimate prey of cattle rustlers, he never for one moment doubted. The situation was conclusive. A bed of glowing embers constantly replenished and kept at white heat served to lighten up the weird scene growing dusky under the surrounding cottonwoods.

Williston thought he recognized in one of the men—the one who seemed to be directing the procedure of this little affair, whose wide and dirty hat rim was so tantalizingly drawn over his eyes—the solitary rider whose unexpected appearance had so startled him a short time before. Both he and his companion were dressed after the rough, nondescript manner of cattle men, both were gay, laughing and talkative, and seemingly as oblivious to possible danger as if engaged in the most innocent and legitimate business.

A little to the left and standing alone was an odd creature of most striking appearance—a large, spotted steer with long, peculiar-looking horns. It was quite impossible to mistake such a possession if it had once been yours. Its right side was turned full toward

Williston and in the center of the hip stood out distinctly the cleanly capered three perpendicular lines that were the identifying mark of the Three Bars ranch, one of those same big, opulent, self-centered outfits whose astonishingly multiplying sign was becoming such a veritable and prophetic writing on the wall for Williston and his kind.

Who, then, had dared to drive before him an animal so branded? The boldness of the transgression and the insolent indifference to the enmity of attendant consequences held him for the moment breathless. His attention was once more called to the movements of the men. The steers with which they had been working was led away still moaning with surprise and pain, and another brought forward from the reserve bunch. The branded hip, if it was a brand, was turned away from Williston. The bewildered animal was cleverly roped and thrown to the ground. The man who was plainly directing the affair, he of the drooping hat and lazy shoulders, stepped to

the fire. Williston held his breath with the intensity of his interest. The man stooped and took an iron rod from the fire. It was the endgame rod of a wagon and it was red hot. In the act of straightening himself from his stooping position, the glowing iron stick in his right hand, he flung from his head with an easy swing the flaming hat that interfered with the necessity of slight reprieve in the work he was about to do, and faced squarely that quiet, innocent looking spot which held the watching man in its grasp. And in the moment in which Williston drew hastily back, the fear of discovery, finding a tatter of cold chili down his spine, recollection of the man came to him in a clarifying burst of comprehension.

But the man evidently saw nothing and suspected nothing. His casual glance was probably only a manifestation of his habitual attitude of being never off his guard. He approached the prostrate steer with indifference to any meaning that might be attached to the soft snapping of twigs caused by Williston's involuntary drawing back into the denser shadows.

"You don't suppose now, do you, that any blamed, interloper's offer is afloat round where he oughtn't to be?" said the second man with a laugh.

Williston, much relieved, again peered cautiously through the brush. He was confident a brand was about to be worked over. He must see—what there was to see.

"Easy now, boss," said the second man with an officious warning. He was a big, beefy fellow with a heavy, hardened face. Williston sounded the depths of his memory but failed to place him among his acquaintances in the cow country.

"Gamble on me," returned the leader, with ready good nature. "I'll make it as clean as a boiled shirt. I take it you don't know my reputation, pard. Well, you'll learn. You're all right, only a trifle green, that's all."

With a firm, quick hand, he began running the searing iron over the right hip of the animal. When he had finished and the steer, released, staggered to its feet, Williston saw the brand clearly. It was J. R. If it had been worked over another brand, it certainly was a clear job. He could see no indications of any old markings whatsoever.

"Too clean to be worked over a lazy S," thought Williston, "but not over three bars."

"There were six reds," said the chief, surveying the remaining brand with a critical eye. "One must have wandered off while I was gone. Get out there in the brush and round him up, Alec, while I tackle this long-horned gentleman."

Williston turned noiselessly away from the scene which so suddenly threatened danger. Both men were fully armed and would brook no eavesdropping. Once more he crossed the sand in safety and found his horse where he had left him, up the ravine. He vaulted into the saddle and galloped away into the quiet night.

CHAPTER II.

"On the Trail."

Williston himself came to the door. His thin, scholarly face looked drawn and worn in the mid-day glare. A tiredness in the eyes told graphically of a sleepless night.

"I'm glad to see you, Langford," he said. "It was good of you to come. Leave your horse for Mary. She'll give her water when she's cooled off a bit."

"You sent for me, Williston?" asked the younger man, rubbing his face affectionately against the wet neck of his mare.

"I did. It was good of you to come to me."

"Fortunately your messenger found me at home. As for the rest, Sade, here, hasn't her heat in the cow country, if she is only a cow pony, eh, Sade?"

At that moment Mary Williston came into the open doorway of the rude chain shanty set down in the very heart of the sun-scorched plain which stretched away into heart-choking distances from every possible point of the compass. And sweet she was to look upon, though tanned and glowing from close association with the ardent sun and riotous wind. Her burn hair, more reddish on the edges from sunburn, was fine and soft and there was much of it. It seemed newly brushed and suspiciously glossy. One sees far on the plains, and two years out of civilization are not enough to make a girl forget the use of a mirror, even if it be but a broken silver, propped up on a pine-board dressing table. She looked strangely grown-up despite her short, rough skirt and badly scuffed leather riding leggings. Langford stared at her with a startled look of mingled admiration and astonishment. She came forward and put her hand on the mare's bridle. She was not embarrassed in the least. But the color came into the stranger's face. He swept his wide hat from his head quickly.

"No indeed, Miss Williston; I'll water Sade myself."

"Please lead me, I'd love to," "She's used to it, Langford," said Williston in his quiet, gentlemanly voice, the well-bred cadence of which spoke of a training far removed from the harassments and harshnesses of life in this plains country. "You see, she is the only boy I have. She must necessarily be my chore boy as well as my herd boy. In her leisure moments she holds down her kitchen claim; I don't know how she does it, but she does. You had better let her do it; she will hold it against you if you don't."

"But I couldn't have a woman doing my grooming for me. Why, the very idea!"

He sprang into the saddle. "But you waited for me to do it," said the girl, looking up at him curiously.

"Did I? I didn't mean to. Yes, I did, too. But I beg your pardon. You see—say, look here; are you the 'little girl' who left word for me this morning?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, you see," smiling, but apologetic, "one of the boys said that Williston's little girl had ridden over and

said her father wanted to see me as soon as I could come. So, you see, I thought—"

"Dad always calls me that, so most of the people around here do, too. It is very silly."

"I don't think so at all. I only wonder why I have not known about you before, with a frank smile. It must be because I've been away so much of the time lately. Why didn't you wait for me?" he asked suddenly. "Ten miles is a sort of a lonesome run—for a girl."

"I did wait a while," said Mary, honestly, "but you didn't seem in any hurry. I expect you didn't care to be bored that long way with the silly chatter of a 'little girl.'"

"Well," said Langford, ruefully, "I'm afraid I did feel a little relieved when I found you had not waited. I never will again. I do beg your pardon," he called, laughing, over his shoulder as he galloped away to the stables.

When he returned there was no one to receive him but Williston. Together they entered the house. It was a small room into which Langford was ushered. It was also very plain. It was more than that, it was shabby. An easy chair or two that had survived the wreckage of the house of Williston had been shipped to this "land of promise," together with a few other articles such as were absolutely indispensable. The table was a big shipping box, though Langford did not notice that, for it was neatly covered with a moth-eaten plum-colored felt cloth. A rug, crocheted out of parti-colored rags, a relic of Mary's conservative and thrifty grandmother, served as a carpet for the living room. A peep through the open door into the next and only other room disclosed glimpses of matting on the floor.

There was a holy place even in this castaway house on the prairie. As the young man's careless eyes took in this new significance, the door closed softly. The "little girl" had shut herself in.

The two men sat down at the table. It was hot. They were perspiring freely. The flies, swarming through the screenless doorway, stung disagreeably.

Lacrimally Williston told his story. He wasted no words in the telling. In the presence of the man whose big success made his own pitiful failures inconspicuous, his sensitive scholar's nature had shut up like a clam.

Langford's law was set. His young face was tense with interest. He had thrown his hat on the floor as he came in, as is the way with men who have lived much without women. He had a strong, bronzed face with dark-dove eyes, blue they were, too, and he had a certain turn of the head, a mark of distinction which success always gives to his sons. He had his shoulders, clad in a blue flannel shirt open at the throat. In his absorption he had forgotten the "little girl" as completely as if she had, in very truth, been the 10-year-old of his imagination. How plainly he could see all the unholy situation—the beautiful of desperate men perfectly protected on the little island. One man sighting from behind a cottonwood could play havoc with a whole sheriff's posse on that open stretch of sand-bar. Nothing but a surprise—and did these insolent men fear surprise? They had laughed at the suggestion of the wear presence of an officer of the law. And did they not do well to laugh? Surely it was a joke, a good one, this idea of an officer's being where he was needed in Kenah county.

"And my brand was on that spotted steer," he interrupted. "I know the creature—know him well. He has a mean eye. Had the gall to dispute the right of way with me once, not so long ago, either. He was in the corral at the time, but he's been on his range all summer. He may have the evil eye all right, but he's mine, had eye and all; and what is mine, I will have. And is that the only original brand you saw?"

"The only one," quietly, "unless the J. R. on that red steer when he got up on an original one."

"J. R.? Who could J. R. be?"

"I couldn't say, but the man was—Jesse Black."

The repeated words were fairly spit out.

"Jesse Black! I might have known. Who else bold enough to loot the Three Bars? But his day has come. Not a hair, nor a hide, nor a hoof, not tallow enough to fry a flapjack shall be left on the Three Bars before he repents his insolence."

"What will you do?" asked Williston.

"What will you do?" retorted Langford.

"I? What can I do?" in the vague, helpless manner of the dreamer. "Everything—if you will," briefly. He snatched up his wide hat.

"Where are you going?" asked Williston, curiously.

"To see Dick Gordon before this day is an hour older. Will you come along?"

"Yes—yes," hesitatingly. "Gordon hasn't made much success of things so far, has he?"

"Because you—and men like you—are under the thumb of men like

Jesse Black," said Langford, curtly. "Afraid to peach for fear of antagonizing the gang. Afraid to vote

against the tools of the cattle thieves for fear of antagonizing the gang. Afraid to call your souls your own for fear of antagonizing the gang. Your 'on the fence' policy didn't work very well this time, did it? You haven't found your cattle, have you? The angel must have forgotten. Thought you were tainted of Egypt, eh?"

"It is easy for you to talk," said Williston, simply. "It would be difficult if your brand and butter and you little girls as well depended on a sawnaw little bunch like mine."

"Maybe," said Langford, shrugging his shoulders. "Doesn't seem to have exempted you, though, does it? But Black is no respecter of persons, you know. However, the time has come for Dick Gordon to show of what stuff he is made. It was for this that I worked for his election, though I confess I little thought at the time that proofs for him would be furnished from my own herd. Present conditions humiliate me utterly. Am I a weakling that they should exist? Are we all weaklings?"

A faint, appreciative smile passed over Williston's face. No, Langford did not look a weakling, neither had the professed humiliation lowered his proud head.

Langford strode to the door. Then he turned quickly.

"Look here, Williston, I shall make you angry, I suppose, but it has to go in the cattle country, and you little fellows haven't shown up very white in these deals; you know that yourself."

"Well?"

"Are you going to stand pat with us?"

"If you mean, am I going to tell what I know when called upon," answered Williston, with a simple dignity that made Langford color with sudden shame. "I am. There are many of us 'little fellows' who would have been glad to stand up against the rustling outrages long ago had we received any backing. The moral support of men of your class has not been what you might call a sort of 'on the spot' support, now, has it?"

relapsing into a gentle sarcasm. "At least, until you came to the front," he qualified.

"You will not be the loser, and there's my hand on it," said Langford, frankly and earnestly, ignoring the latter part of the speech. "The Three Bars never forgets a friend. They may do you before we are through with them, Williston, but remember, the Three Bars never forgets."

Mary Williston, from her window, as is the way with a maid, watched the two horsemen for many a mile as they galloped away. She followed them with her eyes while they slowly became faint, moving specks in the level distance and until they were altogether blotted out, and there was no sign of living thing on the plain that stretched between. But Paul Langford, as is the way with a man, forgot that he had seen a beautiful girl, and had thrilled to her glance. He looked back not once as he urged his trusty little mare on to see Dick Gordon.

CHAPTER III.

Louise.

It was raining when she left Wind City, but the rain had soon been stilled. Perhaps the judge was right when he said it never rained north or west of Wind City. But the judge had not wanted her to go. Neither had the judge's wife.

Full 20 minutes, only day before yesterday the judge had delayed his day's outing at the mill where the Jim river doubles right around its tracks, in order to make it perfectly

clear to her that it was absolutely outside the bounds of her duty, that it was altogether an affair on the side, that she could not be expected to go, and that the prosecuting attorney up there had merely asked her out of courtesy, in deference to her position. Of course he would be glad enough to get her, but let him get some one nearer home, or do without. It wasn't at all necessary for the court reporter to hold herself in readiness to answer the call of any duties outside her prescribed circuit duties. To be sure, she would earn a trifle, but it was a hard trip, a hard country, and she had much better postpone her initial journey into the unknown until the regular term of court when he could be with her. He had then his shoulders, taken his minnow pail in one hand and his reel case and lunch box in the other, and walked out to the road wagon awaiting him, at the gate, and so off to his frolic, leaving her to fight it out for herself.

The judge's wife had not been so diplomatic, not by any means. She had dwelt long and earnestly, and no doubt to a large extent truly, on the uncivilized condition of their neighbors up the line; the roughness of accommodations, the boldness and license of the cow-boys, the daring and insolence of cattle thieves, and cunning and dishonesty of the Indians, and the uncleanliness and viciousness of the half-breeds. She had ended by declaring eloquently that Louise would die of loneliness if she, by God's good providence, she escaped a worse fate at the hands of one or all of the many evils she had enumerated. Yes, it was very evident Aunt Helen had not wanted her to go. But Aunt Helen's real reason had been that she held it so distasteful to her to have her niece go to that wild and unwholesome land alone. She did not actually fear for her niece's personal safety, and Louise more than half suspected the truth.

She had heard all the arguments before. They had little or no terrors for her now. They were the arguments used by the people back in her eastern home, those dear, dear people, her people—how far away she was!—when they had schemed and plotted so pathetically to keep her with them, the second one to break away from the slow, safe, and calm traditions of her kin in the place whose generation after generation of her people had lived and died, and now lay waiting the great judgment in the peaceful country burying-



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ground. She had listened to them dutifully, half-bellering, swallowed hard and followed her uncle, her father's youngest brother, to the "Land of the Dakotas."

Now, that same dear uncle was a man of power and position in the new land. Only last November he had been re-elected to his third term on the bench of his circuit with a big, heart-stirring majority. In the day of his prosperity he had not forgotten the little, tangle-haired girl who had cried so inconsolably when he went away, and the unaccountable horror in whose eyes he had tried to laugh away on that never-to-be-forgotten day when he had wrenched his heartstrings from their safe abiding place and gone forth in quest of the pot of gold at the rainbow's end—the first of many generations. Tradition knew no other since his ancestors had felled forests and built homes of brown logs. Now he had sent for Louise. His court reporter had recently left him for other fields of labor.

There was connection among her people on account of the astounding proposition. She lived over again the dark days of the first blitting. It might well be her uncle had exaggerated the dangers of life in the new land. It was great fun to shock his credulous relatives. He had surely written them some enormous tales during those 15 years he had been used to chuckle heartily to himself at reading some of the sympathizing replies. But these tales were held in evidence against him now that he dared to want Louise. Every letter was brought out by Louise's dear old grandmother and read to her over again. Louise did not half believe them, but they were gospel truth to her father and mother as well. She remembered the old spirit of fun rampant in her favorite uncle, and while his vivid pictures took all the color from her sensitive face, deep down in her heart she recognized them for what they were worth. The letters were a strange medley of grasshoppers, blizzards and Indians. But a tender per diem was a great temptation to a five-dollar per diem, and times were pretty hard on the old farm. More than all, the inexplicable something that had led her uncle to throw tradition to the four winds of heaven was calling her persistently and would not be denied.

The dear hero of her childhood was much changed to be sure; his big joints had taken on more flesh, and he had gained in dignity of deportment what he had lost in ease of movement. His once merry eye had grown keen with the years of just judging. The lips that had laughed so much in the old days were set in lines of sternness. Judge Hammond Dale was a man who would live up to the tenets of his high calling without fear or favor, through good and evil report. Yet through all his gravity of demeanor and the pride of his integrity, Louise instinctively felt his kindness and loved him for it. The loneliness fell away from her and a measure of content had come in its place, until the letter had come from the state's attorney up in Kenah county.

My Dear Miss Dale: The election of August is the danger for the criminal. Any hearing of Jesse Black, Williston come and take the testimony. I am very anxious that the testimony be taken by a competent reporter and shall be gratified to you if you decide to go. The judge will tell you about our accommodations, and the government to your satisfaction, and shall be gratified to you if you decide to go. They have two good nights northward of Kenah. This is the best place for you. They are cultured people, though their way of living is somewhat primitive. I am sure you will like them, and that our charming little house, which is a rendezvous for a pretty much class of men, will be a good place for you. If you decide to go, Miss Williston will meet you at Wind City, and you know your way. (Helen's signature.)

So here she was, going into the Indian country at last. A big state, South Dakota, and the phrase of its civilization manifest. Having come so far, to refuse to go on seemed like turning back. Her hand already on the pommel, as with a stout heart she had wired Richard Gordon that she would go. But it was just, hard now, to be sure, and those dreary, coming into Velpen, Kansas, that she would see no one she knew in all the wide, wide world. This thought could not be of the stark and horns and devil's eyes, loomed fearfully before her.

The one she feared the battle of Platte by Sir Joseph Astley was, "Then, however, O Lord, that I shall be very hard this day, and if I forget thee, thou shalt not be forgotten." As King Edward advanced with his columns to Barnackham he remonstrated to his aide, seeing the South on his knees. "See, they kneel. The rebels are asking pardon." "Yes, but it is to the King of Rome. These men conquer on the field."

Other records had public prayers before going to battle on several occasions, as, for instance, previous to the battle of Dunbar. It is a curious fact that the English prayer book contains prayers, or at least one prayer, to be said before going into action at sea, while nothing is provided for use before engagements on land.

Large Crater on the Earth.

The volcano Asoan, in southern Japan, on the island of Kjusiu, possesses the largest crater known on earth. It is about fourteen miles across in one direction, by ten or eleven in the other, and is surrounded by walls of an average height of 200 feet. Although the volcano is still active, its eruptions consist only of ash and dust. Indeed, a range of volcanic mountains, evidence of subsequent formation, extends directly across the old crater. In these particulars Asoan resembles some of the craters of the moon, where a long history of successive and gradually enfolded outbreaks of volcanic force is graphically represented.

Knowledge Demonstrated.

"Would you like to attend a lecture on the fine arts?"

"No," answered Mr. Cumrox. "Mother and the girls can make me feel my ignorance sufficiently at home for my charge."—Washington Star.

no one anywhere who seemed to be Mary—no one who might be looking for her. It was evening, too, the lone some evening to those away from home, when thoughts flash and memories sap the courage. Some one pushed her rudely aside. She was in the way of the truck.

"Chances! None of your sass, my lady! There's my hat. Hold it if you don't put no stick in it like a fork. Git out of this, I say!"

The voice was low and convincing. The man wasn't so hot, but some way he looked convincing, too. The truckman stopped aside, but with plucky tenacity answered back.

"Git out yourself! Think you own the whole cattle country, hey? You had a lot of money, hey? Well, the railroad ain't the range, he's got to get that. Let you run your own affairs, will you?"

"Thanky, thanky. And as for my affairs, I'll thank you to just trouble this here railroad official to the back of this here lady—the truck, I say—back shift front, is it? Wasn't here? I was educated. That's better. And if you ain't satisfied, say, I belong to the Three Bars. Ever hear of the Three Bars? If I'm out, just leave word with the boss, will you? I'll see I git the word. Yes, yes, you of boss thief, I belong to the Three Bars."

The encounter was not without interesting spectators. Louise's braked man was glaring angrily at the discomfited of the fellow employee. Louise herself had forgotten her predicament in the sudden whirlwind of which she was the innocent storm center.

The next with the tender, having completely routed the enemy to the immense satisfaction of the onlookers, thought why, as one knew exactly, nor what the merits of the case, turned abruptly to Louise.

"Are you here?" he asked, with a perceptible cooling of his aggressive bravado.

"I don't know," said Louise smiling faintly at her challenge, though inwardly quaking at the intimation that had flashed upon her that this strange, unsmooth man had come to take the place of Mary. "The boldness and because of the newness